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## SOME COMMENTS ON THE SOURCES OF CHAUCER'S "PARDONER'S TALE."

IN the volume of the "Publications of the Chaucer Society" entitled *Originals and Analogues* there are two contributions containing many versions of the story in Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale" and among them an English rendering of what seems to be the ultimate source. This is the *Vedabbha Jātaka*<sup>1</sup> from the famous Buddhist collection of birth-stories dating from between 400 and 250 B. C. The tale runs in this fashion: Vedabbha, a brahmin who knows a spell to call down wealth from heaven, sets out with his pupil Bodhisattva—the future Buddha. On the way the five hundred Sending thieves capture them and justify their name by sending Bodhisattva for a ransom. He warns the brahmin not to use his spell, lest destruction follow, and departs. The brahmin, nevertheless, calls down the wealth. Now five hundred other thieves make the Sending thieves their prisoners, and slay them and the brahmin with them. Then, dividing among themselves, they kill two hundred and fifty of their number, and so on, until, as a result of this arithmetical warfare, only two are left. These carry off the wealth; one goes to the village for rice, poisons it, and returning is slain by the other, who eats the rice and dies. The Bodhisattva comes back to find the wealth scattered about, then the body of the brahmin, afterward the five hundred dead thieves, the two hundred and fifty, and so on, until he comes upon the last two, the poisoned and the slain. He repeats a fitting moral sentiment, and so the *Jātaka* concludes. So much of the story is necessary to explain other versions, and the resemblance to the "Pardoner's Tale" is already clear. The plot is easily reduced to two essentials: *x*, the virtuous man who warns, and *yy*, a group of characters who carry through the poisoning story. In the history of this tale these two elements will be found to remain surprisingly constant, and even such details as the appended moral to appear again and again.

<sup>1</sup> No. 43 in FAUSBÖLL's edition of the Pali text of the *Jātaka* book.

The popularity of this story is attested by many eastern versions, but for this inquiry only heirs in the European line need to be considered. The first is a Persian story<sup>1</sup> from a twelfth-century poem of Ferîdu-'d-Dîn 'Attâr, and may be called the first Persian story. In its significant episodes Jesus tempts with a mound of gold an evil man to confess a sin. The man confesses and is left with the gold. Two men find him there, and from here on the three represent the *yy* group of the Buddhist tale, and carry through the poisoning story. After the tragedy Jesus returns to pronounce the moral. This tale has a close analogue in Arabic, and the first part at least, as will be hereafter seen, passed into European literature. This first part, the story of Jesus and the evil man, is the new element, and must be set down as a contamination of the old story by a tale from an unknown source. The second Persian version<sup>1</sup> is simpler. The *yy* group appear, find the gold, and play their part, and Christ and the disciples pass by to take the part of *x*. This story also has a close parallel in Arabic, this time in the *Supplementary Arabian Nights*. It seems to have passed with little change into Europe, for *novella* 83 of the *Cento novelle antiche* of the edition of Gualteruzzi is the same tale, with slight changes of detail. This plot probably represents a simplification of the old Buddhist story, into which Christ has been introduced through the influence of the first Persian story. Or we can, for influence here, call upon another eastern story from the *Avadânas*, in which Buddha with a companion find much gold and many precious things. Buddha says, "Behold a venomous serpent;" but the man, tempted by the treasure, carries it home and perishes through the cupidity of his king. We have too little data to do more than indicate some of the ingredients which may have gone into the general solution.

The Italian story just mentioned has many lineal descendants, but it cannot be the immediate source of the "Pardoner's Tale." A story which has more right to such a claim is printed in the *Originals and Analogues* from the edition of the *Cento novelle antiche* edited by Borghini in 1572. A hermit finds a treasure,

<sup>1</sup> See W. A. CLOUSTON, in *Originals and Analogues* ("Publications of the Chaucer Society").

calls it death, and, fleeing from it, meets the group *yy*. These take their usual course, and the story ends with a moral sentiment. But Italian scholars have shown that Borghini is not the originator of this form of the story. He drew his material from two sources<sup>1</sup> — the Gualteruzzi edition of 1525, and a manuscript called Panciatichiano-Palatino 138, whose stories Bartoli, D'Ancona, and other scholars assign to a date only slightly later than the manuscript from which Gualteruzzi must have drawn. The Codex Panciatichiano-Palatino, which I shall hereafter designate as C. P., must have been written before the latter half of the fourteenth century, and is probably of the thirteenth century, while some of the stories are probably earlier.<sup>2</sup> *Novella* 149 of this collection is the same as *novella* 82 Borghini, with this slight difference: Borghini edited his work at a time of reaction from religious influences. As a result, the *santo romito*, or holy hermit, of C. P. 149 becomes merely *romito* in his version, and the moral sentiment which in C. P. has to do with the saving of the soul is softened into a merely prudent warning. We have, therefore, proof of the existence of a story almost identical with Chaucer's in an accessible manuscript of a period considerably anterior to that of the "Pardoner's Tale." But if we assume for a minute that this is the immediate source, or near to it, there is still a question to be answered before we can trace the line back to the East. By what alchemy have the Christ and his disciples of Gualteruzzi and the second Persian versions been transmuted into a wandering hermit fleeing from death?

First be it noted that the Codex Panciatichiano-Palatino consists of two parts originally independent,<sup>3</sup> the first part being taken from the source of Gualteruzzi's edition, with slight variations and additions, the second part consisting of more *novelle* from this source, some duplicated, others lengthened, and new ones from other sources added. In the first part occurs *novella*

<sup>1</sup> See GUIDO BIAGI, *Le novelle antiche dei codici Panciatichiano-Palatino* (1880), pp. 138 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See BARTOLI, *I primi due secoli della letteratura italiana* pp. 284 f.; D'ANCONA, "Del novellino e delle sue fonti," *Studi di critica e storia letteratura* (1880), p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> See BIAGI, *op. cit.*, pp. cxxv ff.; BARTOLI, *Storia della letteratura*, Vol. III, pp. 190 ff., and ADOLF GASPARY, *History of Early Italian Literature to the Death of Dante*, p. 164.

83 of Gualteruzzi, here *novella* 120; that is, the Christ type of our story. *Novella* 149 in the second part is the hermit version of the story and the version which Borghini borrowed. As Biagi points out for the two texts in general, here, indeed, are two versions meeting for the first time.

The hermit version of this story is found in only one of the surviving collections of stories which are earlier than the time of Chaucer. In the latter portion of an Italian miracle-play of the fifteenth century, entitled *Rappresentazione di Sant' Antonio*,<sup>1</sup> there is, however, a plot which bears upon the point in question. St. Antony, wandering through the desert on his way to become a hermit, is tempted, first by a silver dish, and then by a mound of gold. He leaves the gold, and, meeting two robbers, warns them to turn back from the death in their way. They are joined by a third robber, disregard the warning, and go through the old poisoning story, with an angel at the end to take the part of *x*. As D'Ancona says, and as a perusal of the play shows, this poisoning story seems to have only an artificial connection with the amplified legend to which it is joined. As a matter of fact, the Antony of the temptation is the famous St. Antony, the "glorioso e santissimo abate Anton d'Egitto, famoso eremita," as the original miracle-play has it. Furthermore, this same story of the temptation may be found in his life in the works of Athanasius (fourth century), and in *The Lives of the Fathers*. Clouston's statement that this story refers to St. Antony of Padua, a famous preacher, has therefore no authority. So much for the story of St. Antony; but, to quote from D'Ancona's introduction to the play: "The episode of the thieves is an addition to the legend made by the poet, or, as is more probable, by the popular tradition which the poet was then reproducing." Consider the names and actions of the three thieves, and the assertion that this is an old and well-known story becomes even better founded. Scaramuccia is one; Carapello is another; Tagliagambe, the third. Scaramuccia is merely the familiar Neapolitan mask character, the braggart who figures so prominently in the *commedia dell' arte* which was soon to take a literary form. The other two I have not been

<sup>1</sup> A. D'ANCONA, *Sacre Rappresentazioni*.

able to place among the hosts of stock figures who played parts in the early comedy, but their names and actions leave little doubt of their character. The early *commedia dell' arte* certainly influenced the miracle-play,<sup>1</sup> and this kind of comedy was in full flower in the second half of the fifteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Here, then, we have one of its most popular and most ancient figures, adding, as was the custom, the humor of his well-known character to the interest of an old story.

The latter part of this miracle-play, therefore, quite certainly represents an old story worked into his narrative by the author, in order to relieve the didactic portions by the presence of dearly loved and generally comic characters. This story represents a fusion of the legend of St. Antony with the poisoning story of Buddhist origin. Such a fusion might have come about in two ways. The story of Christ tempting the Jew with the mound of gold is found in slightly altered guise in the Codex Panciatichiano and in Gualteruzzi, dissociated from the poisoning tale which accompanies it in the eastern versions. Other versions of this story "*correvano fra il volgo*" circulated among the common people, as D'Ancona shows. In all versions from the East, where it had its origin, it is, however, associated with the poisoning story. It is, therefore, not improbable that the story containing both these elements, as in the first Persian and first Arabian stories, came over whole, as well as in parts, and might easily confuse its temptation story with that of St. Antony, the resulting tale being the source of the latter part of the miracle-play. Or the tale that is found in Gualteruzzi's edition (83) and as C. P. 120—that is, the story which brings in Christ and his disciples—might suffer a like contamination. The gold that Christ's disciples find, and leave because they are warned that it means death to the soul, would suggest to some narrator the mound of gold which Antony, too, knew meant destruction and from which he fled, and thus the tale would be enriched by a more popular introduction. At all events, there is such a combination in the miracle-play, and there is every reason to suppose that an earlier tale preceded it. This is the more probable because by the very

<sup>1</sup>See BARTOLI, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup>SCHERILLO, *La Commedia dell' arte in Italia*.

easy change from St. Antony, who was a hermit and has always been particularly connected with hermits, to *santo romito*, or "holy hermit," and the omission of the duplicate incident of the silver dish, both changes tending toward simplification, we have the hermit story of C. P. 149 and can account for a reading of the old story which before this is found nowhere else and can be accounted for in no other way.

It is now time to take up Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale," the English version of this story. Only a careful study of the preceding narratives can bring one to a full appreciation of the exquisite art displayed by the English poet in the narrative portion of this tale; for it is not all narrative. Ll. 463-82 and 661-894 make up the story proper; the rest is exposition and argument, very good of the kind, but segregated so as not to interfere with the rapid action of the tale itself.

In Flaundres whilom was a compaignye  
Of yonge folk, that haunteden folye,

Chaucer begins, and tells how they were "riotours," and how "Oure blissed Lordes body they to-tere." After a long digression, these "yonge folk" are suddenly specified as three, and the story moves forward. They learn that one of their companions has been seized by death, and, seeking this "false traytour death," they meet an old man looking for Death, who will not have him. "Up this croked wey—I lafte hym," the old man says, and under a tree they find "Of floryns fyne—wel ny a seven busshels." From now on the incidents are those of the familiar poisoning story, worked out with far more realistic detail than ever before, and concluding with a moral of the same purport as that of the Italian version. The hermit, be it observed, becomes an old man who seeks death instead of fleeing it; but, except for this change, and the elaborated introduction, there is nothing in the plot of Chaucer's poem which materially differs from that of the Italian story C. P. 149, whose origin has just been explained.

This introduction (ll. 463-82), beginning "In Flaundres whilom was a compaignye," has no very direct connection with the rest of the narrative. The description of the riotous living, the "wafereres," and the "tombesteres," has some bearing upon the

sermon which immediately follows it, but none upon the development of the story in ll. 661-894. It is picturesque and characteristic, and there seems to be no reason why it should not be supposed an addition of Chaucer's, imaginative or otherwise, put in as a text upon which to expand his exposition that follows. Some such beginning is necessary in order to give this sermon its greatest cogency and aptest reference to the story. The mention of "Flandres" may point to an original *fabliau*, but may, too, have come out of Chaucer's brain, put in, perhaps, because of the popular idea of the Flemish as a drinking race.<sup>1</sup> Note, too, in this connection that in ll. 475 and 482 of the narrative introduction Chaucer is quoting his own "Parson's Tale," as he does again in the expository portion, but not in the story proper, which, if "The" be substituted for "Thise" in l. 661, "Thise riotours thre of which I speke," and the last clause of this line be omitted, would need no introduction to make it complete. There is no question as to the provenance of the sermon on gluttony and other vices which intervenes between the introduction and this narrative proper, particularly as this expository section contains matter probably quoted from Chaucer's lost translation of Innocent's "De Contemptu Mundi," and more from his own "Parson's Tale,"<sup>2</sup> and is certainly derived from no source connected in any way with the old poisoning story.

Ll. 661-765 of the "Pardoner's Tale" contain the very beautiful story of the old man whom death will not have, and in the complete story which lies in ll. 661-894 these show the only substantial change from the plot of C. P. 149. This should be Chaucer's own, as far as the handling is concerned, and not only on account of its characteristic style; for a classic source (first elegy of Maximian) seems to have been found by Professor Kittredge for the famous lines beginning "And on the ground which is my moodres gate I knocke."<sup>3</sup> Ten Brink has suggested an influence which surely cannot account for the meeting with the old man, but which may have affected the underlying idea and some of the details of this passage. He thinks that there

<sup>1</sup> See notes in SKEAT's edition.

<sup>2</sup> See notes in SKEAT's edition.

<sup>3</sup> See notes in SKEAT's edition.



may be a fusion here with the story of the Wandering Jew. Our first record of this story in English is through Roger de Wendover's *Flowers of History*, which forms the first part of Matthew of Paris's *Chronicle* (1259). Here the man condemned to wait for Christ is "one who is well practised in sorrow." In later versions he is a wanderer from land to land, always wishing for Death, who will not have him. In English the story gets into the ballads,<sup>1</sup> and is well known in folklore.<sup>2</sup> It was so widely spread over Europe in later times that it seems most probable that Chaucer was familiar with some form of the legend. If it exists in some form which may be sufficiently old, containing such details as the search of the wanderer for someone who will "chaunge his youthe for myn age," it will seem very probable that Chaucer enriched the story of the wandering hermit by the memory of such a legend, or, less probably, got his whole story from some source where such an enriching had already taken place. If no such version exists, we can only say that such lines as the question asked of the old man, "Why livestow so longe in so greet age?" his assertion, "And therefore moot I han myn age stille, As longe tyme as it is Goddes wille," and particularly the similarity of the ideas underlying this portion of Chaucer's work and the famous legend, make out a possible explanation of Chaucer's improvement upon the Italian story. As he would have concluded, "ther is namore to say."

And now to sum up. Chaucer's story may be divided for convenience into four parts: an introduction treating of certain "yonge folk" in "Flaundres," a didactic digression, an account of the meeting with the old man whose life Death will not have, and the story proper of the three "riotours" who come to death through murder and poisoning. The introduction, in spite of a hypothetical, and improbable, *fabliau*, may safely be assumed to be Chaucer's, the sermon is undoubtedly of his own working, the episode of the old man may be influenced by the legend of the Wandering Jew, but is certainly based upon the account of the

<sup>1</sup> See PERCY's *Reliques*.

<sup>2</sup> *Folk-lore of the Northern Counties* (published by Folk-Lore Society, 1879), p. 82; see also *The Wandering Jew Telling Fortunes to Englishmen* (1640)—a satire.

*santo romito* in the Italian story. The story proper is merely the amplification of the considerably earlier tale C. P. 149, or one closely resembling it, which would represent such a version as Gualteruzzi 83, modified by fusion with that part of the widespread legend of St. Antony which treats of his adventures on his way to become a hermit. It is possible, however, and probable, that while this explanation holds good, we still have not the immediate source of Chaucer's tale. The probability of the fusion of the St. Antony legend with the poisoning story is partly based upon the joining of these two in a fifteenth-century miracle-play. But there are some rather striking similarities between this play and Chaucer's version, which do not appear when the latter is compared with C. P. 149. Chaucer's villain buys poison that he "may his rattes quelle," while Scaramuccia asks for poison to kill rats which have grown so bold that they gnaw his ears. There is nothing said about rats in C. P. 149. There is another similarity which is still more to the point. After Scaramuccia has gone for the food and drink, the two remaining thieves in the play plan his destruction. One offers to tell to the other a thought which has come to him, if he will swear to tell no one of it, if it does not please him. The other has a like thought, which he will tell on promise of secrecy. The first then points out that the treasure would be much greater if divided between two, rather than among three. This thought pleases the second thief, who counsels that they assault Scaramuccia when he returns and seats himself. Now, if this be compared with the passage in Chaucer contained in ll. 806-34, all the important points of the Italian dialogue will be found duplicated, even to the manner of killing; for Chaucer makes his rascal say, "Looke whan that he is set, and right anoon Arys," etc. Add to this the passage just preceding, ll. 793-805, where the thieves draw cuts to see who shall go to town, precisely as they do in the miracle-play, although there is no mention of such a proceeding in C. P. 149, and the probability of another version current at the same time, but, like "The Pardoner's Tale," more amplified than C. P. 149, must be admitted. This version, which we may assume to have been Chaucer's immediate source, must have been

just the story that the author of the miracle-play used, with the simplification of the St. Antony portion carried out as we find in C. P. 149. That is, it would be a story of a wandering hermit who flies from death in the shape of gold, and the following action of three thieves in a form somewhat more amplified than that of the Italian story which we possess, and closer in detail to the narrative of Chaucer. The Italian story we possess, C. P. 149, is merely another reading, which happens to have been preserved. It is obviously improbable that Chaucer's rendering could have returned to Italy and influenced the dramatic form.

And therefore we may quite safely assume that an Italian story, whose approximate form we possess in C. P. 149, was in the original, or translation, Chaucer's immediate source. But we have accounted for the form of this story in the preceding pages, and so we may trace our line surely back to the East, and probably through the Arabic to the Persian. There, to make a final summary, we find a form of the story, the first Persian, which seems to lie in the direct path of ascent. In it we have a union of two tales. One is the Christ and the evil man story of unknown origin; the other comes directly from the *Jātaka* book, and will probably never be traced farther.

I will take one paragraph more to call attention to an interesting analogue of "The Pardoner's Tale" which does not seem to have been noticed. Kipling's *First Jungle Book* contains the story—one of his best—of "The King's Ankus." Mowgli goes to the old city Cold Lairs with Kaa, the python. There they find a vast treasure in an underground chamber, guarded by a cobra. Mowgli takes a ruby-headed ankus, and is warned by the cobra that it will cause death. He tires of it and throws it away. The next night, with Bagheera, the panther, he follows the trail of a man who has carried it off. First they find a villager slain by the arrow of a Gond, who has disappeared with the ankus; then the body of the Gond, and the trail of three men. After a little while they come upon the dead body of one of them, and a little farther on the corpses of the others, the ankus beside them, and on the dead fire the remnant of a poisoned loaf. Here is the old poisoning story again, and it seems most probable that this

particular plot was found in India and goes back by eastern steps. For it is interesting to see that it seems to preserve the trailing of the Bodhisattva, in which he found first the dead brahmin, then the five hundred dead thieves, then the two hundred and fifty, and so on to the two last, one slain in the bush, the other poisoned beside the wealth. Next to Chaucer's, Kipling's telling of the story is the best, but for rapidity of narration, vividness, and beauty the poet wins easily among all this host of competitors.

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